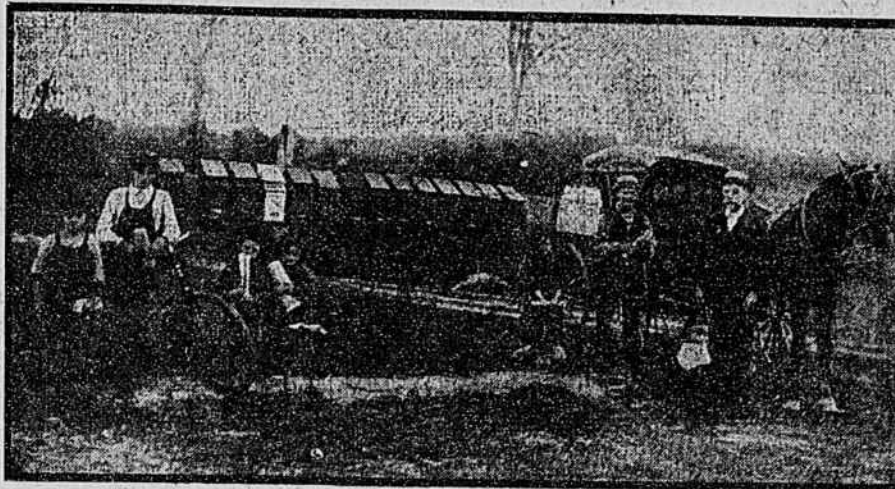


# Parcels Post for Farmer---DeGraw Talks of New Plans for Rural Free Delivery---How System Might Be Inaugurated



THE END OF A ROUTE, SHOWING FOURTEEN MAIL BOXES.



TWENTY MILLION PEOPLE GET

DAILY MAIL BY RURAL DELIVERY.

BY FRANK G. CARPENTER.

Washington, D. C. Fifteen years ago, when Uncle Sam was still but little more than a machine for collecting taxes and paying employees, the man outside the city got his letters as he could but once a day, once a week, or, perhaps, once a month. To do so he had to ride or walk miles, and his only source of sending mail was through the country post-office, to which he must go. Then began the era of Uncle Sam, patriarch and the agents of the Post-Office Department commenced to call daily at the homes of the farmers. This was the beginning of the rural free delivery, which has now spread to every part of the country, and which daily serves more than 20,000,000 people. There are already over 40,000 rural mail carriers, who are always en route, and the miles they daily travel are more than four times as great as from here to the moon. In a year of 300 working days they cover a distance of about 300,000,000 miles, or over three times as far as from the earth to the sun, and the total annual cost of the service approximates \$36,000,000.

**Starting the Rural Free Delivery.** Before I tell you of the new plans which Uncle Sam has for this branch of his business—plans which involve the parcels post and other important additions—I want to say a word as to how the rural free delivery was started. It had been in use in other countries for years when Uncle Sam took it up. The British were sending their letters to almost every home in the United Kingdom, and so were the Belgians, French, Swiss and Germans long before we began to consider the matter. Then about the year 1890 our Postmaster-General began to look into it, and in 1893 one of them reported to Congress against it, saying that it was impracticable and that it would cost at least \$20,000,000 per annum and would bring little back. A year later Congress was willing to test the matter and made an appropriation of \$10,000 for the purpose, but Postmaster-General Blaisell refused to spend the money so foolishly, and when, a year or two later, the appropriation was increased to \$20,000, Postmaster-General Wilson said that the plan was impracticable, and it was not until 1896, when Congress gave him \$50,000, that he made the first test. The business was then started in forty-two places, but it was badly managed and it did not succeed.

The following year it was tried again, but this time at the request of the then first assistant postmaster-general, Mr. Perry S. Heath, who got Congress to appropriate \$150,000 for the purpose. Mr. Heath urged the matter, but some of the Senators objected, and one of them said:

"Mr. Heath, you are acting very unwisely. The first thing you know we will have all our farmers demand-



P. V. DeGraw.

This man has charge of 40,000 rural mail carriers.

ing a daily delivery, and they will cause us no end of trouble.

Perry Heath replied that the farmers had the right to a daily mail as well as city people; that they were taxed just as heavily, and that they had just as great a part in the government. At any rate, the appropriation was granted and eighty-three routes were established that year. The next year the number was doubled, and ten years thereafter the carriers were more than 37,000 in number. At that time the mileage was over 800,000 and the cost had risen to be more than \$20,000,000 per annum. It is now 10,000,000

more, and the length of the routes all told is just about 1,000,000 miles.

**A Talk With General P. V. DeGraw.** During the past week I have had a long chat with the fourth assistant postmaster-general, Mr. P. V. DeGraw, concerning the new plans for the extension of the service. He tells me that the applications for new routes have been largely complied with and that within a few weeks the department will be up-to-date. The service has now been extended to every part of the United States, although there are scattering sections where it has not yet been introduced. Over 500 new

AN IMPROVED MAIL BOX.

routes were provided for last year. During the coming year the new salaries will come into effect, and from now on the carriers who have to cover distances of twenty-four miles or more will receive \$1,000 per annum, ranging down from there to \$400 or \$500, which is the pay for those who cover from six to ten miles.

In my talk with the fourth assistant postmaster-general I asked him if he did not think \$1,000 a rather high wage for a man whose work was altogether outside the city, where board is cheap and wages are generally much lower. He replied:

"It is not a high rate to pay for the service required, and a man could not well do it for less. It is a lower rate comparatively than that of the postmen of the cities, who get from \$600 to \$1,000 a year, according to the size of the town and the length of their service. They receive this without having to make any investment, or to incur any extra expense for their work. The rural free delivery man, who makes twenty-four miles a day for six days of the week, needs at least two horses, and on some of the routes regular service is necessary to render these have to be furnished out of his pocket of the man himself, and he must in addition pay for his vehicle. The estimated average cost of maintaining such an outfit is \$250 per annum, and the original cost of the horse and vehicle is \$750 or more.

The average annual cost of the carrier's outfit, in fact, is from \$200 to \$350, and even at the best he has only \$600 or \$700 left for his wages. "Moreover," continued Mr. DeGraw, "it is found that with the daily wage and the cost of a carrier's equipment is subjected that the life of both horses and vehicles ranges from three to five years, so you see he has not such a soft snap after all. In cases where he travels less than twenty-four miles he gets less money. I am not in favor of too low wages in the Post-Office Department. My idea is the same as that held by former President Roosevelt. This is that 'the national government should be a model employer; that it should demand the highest quality of service from its employees and should care for them properly in return.' The Parcels Post and the Rural Delivery."

"What do you think of the parcels post in connection with the rural delivery? Will it come?"

"Yes, in time, although Congress has not given us an appropriation to experiment with as yet. The Post-Office Department would like to see it tested. It would certainly increase the usefulness of the postal service, and a system might be established for the carriage of merchandise at such rates as would be a fair compensation for the service performed, and would materially increase our revenues. The people want to send small packages of merchandise by mail through the rural delivery, but they will not pay the fourth-class rate. Such a service could be organized for the local merchants and the rural delivery to customers of any one section without injuring or competing with any other service. We have the machinery for it in operation, and it would materially increase the income of the department. By this means a special reduced rate of postage could be made upon merchandise carried only by rural carriers. I have no doubt of its practicability. If ever one of our rural delivery carriers would take on an average of three packages a day at a cost of 25 cents each there would be a return of \$18,000,000 from that business alone. We are now running the department without a deficit, but that sixteen millions would be added to the surplus, for it would not cost us any more than the amount we are now spending."

"A few years ago I recommended that the delivery by rural carriers to communities remote from post-offices be supplemented by a parcels post delivery at a special rate of postage of 5 cents for the first pound and of 2 cents for each additional pound or fraction thereof up to eleven pounds; provided that the goods were mailed at the distributing post-office of the rural route upon which the customers live. I have no doubt some kind of satisfactory arrangement could be made which would be of great con-

venience to the people and to the country merchants."

**Cheap Postage for Foreigners.** "As it is now Mr. DeGraw, a merchant living in London or Berlin, can send goods through our mails more cheaply than though he had a branch office in New York and sent his goods from there, can he not?"

"That is true," was the reply. "According to the present arrangements all fourth-class matter posted at any one place in the United States to any other place therein costs 1 cent an ounce or 16 cents a pound and the limit of weight is four pounds. The New York agent of the London firm, if he sent the goods by mail from New York, would have to divide them up into four-pound packages, and if they were full weight pay 64 cents for each such package, and should he wish to ship eleven pounds, he would have to put them into three different packages, one of which might be three pounds, and the whole eleven pounds would cost him \$1.76. On the other hand, suppose the London merchant shipped direct from his house in London. He could then put the eleven pounds in one package, provided that package was not more than three feet six inches long, and could send it for 12 cents a pound, or for \$1.32. For this sum he could mail it to San Francisco, Los Angeles or any part of the United States. If he sent a four-pound package from London instead of its costing him 64 cents it would cost him 48 cents, and if two pounds, 24 cents instead of 32 cents, which would be the rate if mailed in the United States. Similar rates prevail for the shipment of articles from here to foreign countries, it being much cheaper to send the same article from Chicago to Cairo or Calcutta than from Chicago to New York. In the one case the merchandise goes by the international parcels post rate at 12 cents a pound and in the other at our domestic rate, which is 16 cents a pound."

**The Rural Delivery and the Newspapers.** "What has the rural delivery done for the press of the United States?" I asked.

"It has increased the circulation of the newspapers to an enormous extent. It has made the farmer a daily subscriber and has led to the building up of small dailies all over the country. The farmers are the real thinkers of the United States, and since the rural delivery has been established they have been doing more thinking than ever. They are more careful readers than the city people. They go through the papers column by column, reading the news articles and not merely the headlines. They study the editorials, and the result of their thinking to see in the letters which come here to Washington and to Congress. We have had to discontinue some of our routes, and in such cases we find that the most strenuous protests come from those who are thus prevented from daily receiving their favorite newspapers."

**Working for Road Improvement.** "Another important thing the rural mail service is accomplishing," said the fourth assistant postmaster-general, "is connected with the roads of the country. We are now working with the Agricultural Departmental Bureau of Road Improvement, and are

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"During his teething period, his head and face were broken out in boils which I cured with Cuticura Soap and Ointment. Surely he must have been a great sufferer. During the time of teething and from the time I dropped the doctor's treatment, I used the Cuticura Soap and Cuticura Ointment, nothing else, and when two years old he was the picture of health. His complexion was soft and beautiful, and his head a mass of silky curls. I had been afraid that he would never be able to grow up, but I owe a great deal to the Cuticura Remedies." (Signed) Mrs. Mary W. Ramsey, 224 E. Jackson St., Colorado Springs, Colo., Sept. 24, 1910.

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insisting on good roads wherever the mails are carried. We refuse to grant a route until the roads have been put into shape, and if they become impassable or in such a condition that the delivery cannot be easily continued over them, we insist that they be repaired or say that the service will be discontinued. In this work we are assisted by the road officials of many of the States, who send out to each rural carrier a blank containing questions to be answered as to the conditions of the roads over which he travels.

"He is asked to report as to the materials of which they are composed, as to the condition of their bridges, and as to how they are worked. "The State of Indiana, for instance, has made a law that all the highways along the rural delivery routes must be kept in passable condition all the year round. A neglect to comply with this law after five days' notice is punishable by a fine of from \$1 to \$25 per day, which is levied on the locality. Other States are considering similar laws, and by these means material improvements are being made in the roads of the country.

"As it is now our carriers are going daily over nearly a million miles of roadway, and we have now instructed the postmasters at the rural delivery offices to send in detailed reports concerning these roads. So far we find that only 35,000 miles of them are of macadam, the remainder being of earth, sand or gravel. The reports show that since the rural delivery service was established, more than \$2,000,000 has been expended on the roads traversed by our carriers, and we are glad to say that the road officials and people generally are doing much to put the roads into better shape for the service. In the past year more work has been done on such public highways than in any other year since the rural delivery was started, and our reports indicate that a general interest in road improvement is being manifested throughout the country.

**The Passing of the Small Post-Offices.** "Does not the rural delivery do away with many of the smaller post-offices?" I asked.

"They have been discontinued by the thousand. There is no necessity for many such offices with an efficient rural carrier service. The carrier is not a mere collector and distributor of the mail. His wagon is a miniature post-office on wheels, often containing compartments for stamps of the denominations in general use and stamped envelopes and postal cards. He has the authority to sell these as well as to register letters delivered to him which may contain money or other valuable matter. In some places he is authorized to exchange currency for money orders sent by the people on his route, and he delivers registered letters and special delivery mail to the individuals, taking their signature therefor. If a farmer wishes to mail a letter and has no stamps he can leave the amount necessary to prepay the postage with the letter in the box and the carrier must stamp it. In short, the service is as far as possible what I have described it—a little post-office on wheels."

**Making Road Maps of the United States.** "What else is your division doing, Mr. DeGraw?"

"As to this division," said the fourth assistant postmaster-general, "it does considerable outside the rural delivery service. We have to do with all the dead letter mail, which last year amounted to over thirteen million pieces, of which we opened and returned to their owners more than seven million. We have a force of

178 clerks, under Colonel James R. Young, who do nothing but handle dead letters and packages which have been too badly addressed to be delivered. That alone is quite a chore."

"But outside that and more directly connected with the rural delivery service is the division of topography. This is little appreciated except here in the department, but it is an important cog in our machinery. It collects, compiles and publishes all the geographical information required by the service, including the platting of existing post-offices and the mail routes. This information is embodied in post-route maps and in blue prints. We have 500 such maps in the department here, and they have to be corrected due every month. In addition we have about twenty-three thousand special diagrams, which are intended for the railway mail service and we have to draft maps of the counties where the complete rural delivery service has been established. We made 275 new maps of that kind last year. These maps are of great value, not only to the department, but to outsiders. They are used by business firms and private individuals and are sold at just 10 per cent. over the cost of printing, the proceeds going to make more maps. Indeed we have plenty to do."

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